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Striving together: celebrating competitiveness in sport

REVISED VERSION

May 2014



The Church of Scotland
Church and Society Council

STRIVING TOGETHER: CELEBRATING COMPETITIVENESS IN SPORT

- Urge that all involved in competitive sport play fairly, ethically, within the rules, and within the spirit of the rules.
- Encourage churches to ensure equality of opportunity of participation of all, for all of their activities, including those which involve sport and competition.
- Commend the expansion of sports chaplaincy to sports other than football and encourage it in a wide variety of endeavours.
- Welcome the commitment of the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee to promote fair play by all competitors.
- Commend the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee for valuing equality and encourage it further in fulfilling its aim for equality for all.
- Commend the Scottish Government to involve all in ensuring a lasting legacy from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, particularly in deprived areas.
- Urge the Olympics Organising Committee to implement values of equality and ensure ways of giving minority groups a voice.
- Urge the Scottish and UK Governments and sporting bodies to implement measures designed to reduce hazardous and harmful gambling and to impose a ban on advertising gambling in the context of sports.
- Urge the Scottish and UK Governments and sporting bodies to impose a ban on advertising short-term ('pay-day') loan companies who charge exorbitant rates.

Striving Together: Celebrating Competitiveness in Sport

1. Introduction

With the Commonwealth Games taking place in Glasgow in 2014, sport is set to have a prominent profile in Scotland.

Competitiveness in sport can draw out the best in people, but can also give rise to other behaviours which may cause concern. This report reflects on the place of competitiveness, based on the principles of loving our neighbours and treating others as we would want to be treated.

2. Christianity and Sport

In the early church, the response to sports was often one of suspicion, but movements such as 'Muscular Christianity' in the 19th century embraced sport more fully.¹

More recently, some have argued that, while competition can elevate the character of those who are involved, there can be unhelpful pressures on athletes, such as enhancing their performance through all possible means.

3. Competitiveness

The word competition can mean both '*striving together*' and '*striving against*'. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul invokes an image of striving, *together* and *against*, to highlight both our interconnectedness and interdependence².

Both elements of striving are important. Setting competition within the context of the command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, competitors *strive together*, with God and others, pushing themselves so as to perform to the best of their abilities.

Competitiveness between individuals or teams, where there is mutual respect, exemplifies '*striving together*'. Whether winning or losing, sport can encourage a sense of belonging, co-operation and teamwork, and fosters self-control, persistence and self-discipline.

We believe that all involved in competitive sport can be guided by Jesus' words:

¹ Erdozain D (2010) *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

² 1 Corinthians 12:14-23.

*'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.'*³

4. Winning and Losing

The thrill in achieving one's goal is a major part of the reward for a game well played. However, it may be that despite playing well, the opponent's performance is superior and we don't win. In competitive sport, we are responsible for pleasing God first, before everyone else.

Those who are defeated can experience feelings ranging from disappointment to shame. Some may feel they have also lost face, or have let others down. It may take time to come to terms with losing, but defeat can provide valuable lessons.

5. Relationships

5.1 Family Matters

Seeing a family member excel provides great joy. However, the families of sportspeople may need patience and compassion during difficult training schedules or disappointing results.

Sport teaches children vital life lessons, including discipline and working as part of a team, working hard to achieve success and accepting defeat graciously. Those supporting young people in sport should uphold high standards of behaviour. However, in our enthusiasm it is easy to push boundaries- shouting abuse at officials or opponents, for example.

Family members often sacrifice time, money, friendships and perhaps even the quality of their relationships, and this may add to athletes' pressure, particularly when they fail to achieve the success for which they had hoped.

5.2 Supporters

Sports fans join together in celebrating successes but can be quick to voice displeasure when their hopes are unfulfilled. Sporting rivalries exaggerate differences between neighbourhoods, cities or countries. Jesus teaches us to love one another and to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. This means striving against feelings of hatred and becoming reconciled to the fact that we are all loved equally as God's children.

³ Matthew 7:12

5.3 Team mates

As well as competition against the opposition, there can be competition within the team. The dynamics of a sports team are complex- sense of team when they play but, particularly in professional sport, with fierce competition between squad members.

5.4 The Coach

The coach seeks to encourage and inspire, challenging athletes to push their limits to perform to the best of their abilities, helping them deal with success and disappointment.

While it is important that coaches address the ethical dimension of competition, this is an area where sports chaplains could complement their role.

5.5 The Sports Chaplain

Chaplains are concerned with the holistic wellbeing of people in sport, helping players to recognise that there is more to life than winning, adulation and money. Whether one has a religious faith or not, chaplains can help people to recognise the importance of esteem, love, and hope.

5.6 The Opponent

We should treat our opponents in the way that we want to be treated: with respect, playing hard but not seeking an unfair advantage.

In Hebrews 10 we are encouraged to *'consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds'*⁴. This idea of encouragement to excel translates well to the context of competition- opponents motivate each other to rise to the challenge of the contest while playing fairly and respecting each other.

5.7 Sponsors

Sportspeople may experience dilemmas over endorsing products which they feel are unethical. Whilst sports sponsorship by tobacco companies is banned, no such ban applies to alcohol, gambling

⁴ Hebrews 10: 24.

or payday lenders. There has been a campaign by English football fans against such advertising on club websites⁵. However sponsorship of individual clubs continues to be a concern.

6. Money matters

*'And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'*⁶

Money has a powerful influence on the potential for success in sport. Teams in the top leagues have money to buy the best players and so maintain their position; those in lower leagues have fewer such opportunities, thus restricting their chances of promotion to a higher league.

In recent years there has been a marked increase in sponsorship, particularly of football, by gambling companies⁷. There has been a parallel increase in gambling in the general population. Problem gambling can be kept hidden and undetected in its early stages.

Players may also succumb to the temptation to get involved in 'match fixing' on the direction of the gambling fraternity.

7. Equality issues

While women's sport in Britain has never been stronger, inequalities in earnings between the genders remain. Cultural pressures on young girls may discourage them from active involvement in sport.

Those from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are significantly less likely to participate in sport, particularly at club level, than their white counterparts⁸.

The 2012 London Paralympics showcased disability sport in an unprecedented way, but more needs to be done. For people with a disability, participation can help rehabilitation both physically and socially, reducing stigma and discrimination.

In many countries there is little or no access for disabled people to appropriate sports facilities or technological aids. Opportunities to compete are compromised by insufficient funding, not only to train but also to travel.

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/jun/18/football-league-wonga-advertising>, accessed 12.12.2013.

⁶ Philippians 4:19

⁷ Danson A (2010) *Legal and regulatory update Sponsorship by gambling companies in the UK and Europe: The opportunities and challenges*. Journal of Sponsorship 3: 2, 194 – 201.

⁸ <http://www.sportingequals.org.uk/PICS/BME%20Final%20Full%20%20Report.pdf>, accessed 25.10.13.

Equality is one of the three values that underpin the philosophy of the Commonwealth Games Federation, the organisation responsible for the Games. While this is to be welcomed, equality of opportunity at ground level, particularly for disabled athletes, still has some way to go.

8. Technology and Science

The desire to win pushes competitors and the industry which supports elite performers to maximise performance through a variety of means.

Science and technology have led to improved equipment and have also influenced competitive performance through understanding of human physiology. The use of genetics to change or improve competitive performance ('gene doping') is of interest to many, although the technology is not yet available.

Drugs have been widely used in some sports. The World Anti-doping Agency (WADA) is involved in a constant struggle to stay ahead of those who try to gain advantage through using banned substances. The use of drugs which could be used for medicinal purposes can also be problematic.

There is a fine line between the legitimate use of physiological, technological and psychological strategies to gain advantage and those which infringe legal and morally acceptable practice.

Using banned substances not only carries health risks for the competitor but also constitutes cheating. It brings disappointment to all who have supported the athlete, and disrespect to the very name of sport.

9. Sports, social justice and peace

At its best, sport can contribute to social justice, playing a valuable role in fostering inclusion and building strong community relationships. At its worst, it can divide and heighten tensions.

Sport and education programmes have been involved in peace-making work in many places. Few political leaders have understood or been more committed to the potential of sport more than Nelson Mandela. Sport, Mandela said, *'has the power... to unite people in a way that little else does'*⁹. 'It speaks to youth in a language they understand' and 'it can create hope where once there was only despair'.

In Scotland the ugly face of sectarianism has been associated with football, and a recent study

⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/2327308/Nelson-Mandela-plan-to-tap-into-TV-millions.html>

conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that, despite significant progress made in past years, sport continues to face a number of challenges across member states related to racism and ethnic discrimination¹⁰.

10. Competing for time: Church or Sunday sport?

In the modern world much sport takes place on a Sunday, which raises issues for the church-going family.

For some there is an intrinsic problem with playing sport on a Sunday. For others there is only a problem if there is a clash with service times. Innovations such as Messy Church offer alternative ways for families to worship, as do mid-week services that may otherwise follow more traditional forms of worship.

11 .Conclusion

Sport offers benefits for many aspects of life.

In competitive sport as in all aspects of our lives, we are called to follow Jesus' command to '*Love your neighbour as yourself*¹¹' and to '*do to others what you would have them do to you*¹²'. Competitive sport can provide an arena for giving thanks to God for talents, opportunities to compete, and for relationships fostered through sport.

Competition involves *striving together* while also *striving against* one's opponent. Playing against an opponent who is well matched pushes competitors to reach a higher level. It is when they '*spur one another on toward love and good deeds encouraging one another*¹³' that they can strive best together in competition. Much is lost when competition is seen solely as '*striving against*' others

In the true spirit of *striving together*, we should:

*'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*¹⁴.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/sport/documents/publications/tk3209201_en.pdf

¹¹ Matthew 22:39

¹² Matthew 7:12

¹³ Hebrews 10:24.

¹⁴ Philippians 2: 3 - 4.

*'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.'*¹⁵

¹⁵ Philippians 1:27.

STRIVING TOGETHER: CELEBRATING COMPETITIVENESS IN SPORT

1. Introduction

Sport plays a major part in Scotland's culture and, with the Commonwealth Games taking place in Glasgow in 2014, it is set to have an even more prominent profile. Participation in sport promotes health and wellbeing and, when played as a team activity, fosters a sense of responsibility and is a positive force for social cohesion and crime reduction.

The opportunity to be involved as a participant or as a supporter in sports is wide and, since most sports can be played at any level, opportunities exist for most people to take part in sport in some way, irrespective of natural talent or ability. The importance of sport in people's lives ranges from that of their job and livelihood, to that of the serious amateur who makes a regular commitment to sport, the recreational participant for whom it is a hobby, the fan for whom it forms a major part of their identity, and to those who have only a passing interest.

Competitiveness in sport can draw out the very best in people but it can also give rise to the use of unfair tactics that can lead to cheating and the fraudulent behaviour involved in manipulating match results. Following a brief overview of the historical relationship between Christianity and sport, this report aims to reflect on the place of competitiveness in sport in contemporary Scottish life and to consider a Christian response to some of the challenges posed, based on the fundamental principles of loving our neighbours and treating others as we would want them to treat us.

2. Christianity and Sport

The Christian attitude to sport and competition has long been ambivalent. Although there are allusions in the Old Testament to what we might consider sports (e.g. swimming in Isaiah 25:11, archery in I Sam 20), it should be noted that these are not usually in the context of competition. The reference to racing in Jeremiah 12:5 is one of the few in the Old Testament to what might be seen as competitive sport.

While Paul in his letters makes reference to a number of sporting events¹⁶, apparently without disapproval, in the first centuries of Christendom the Christian response to sports was often one of strong suspicion. Many of the earliest Christian preachers and theologians considered "the games" antithetical to the Christian way of life. This was not only because of the reputation of the

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:25; Gal 5: 7; 2 Timothy 4:7 1 Corinthians 9:25; Gal 5: 7; 2 Timothy 4:7

competitors' lifestyles, but also because public games were seen as being deeply intertwined with pagan and nationalist cultic worship¹⁷.

The German Reformation leader Martin Luther encouraged his followers to participate in forms of exercise that were considered honourable and useful, such as dancing, archery, fencing and wrestling. For a period of a little more than a century from about 1540, those in power in Scotland alternately restrained and encouraged sport. Religious reformers wanted to control behaviour on the Sabbath. The Stewart monarchs supported archery practice after Mass; James VI approved of sport but after the Reformation the Kirk sought to place restraints on sport.

It was in the 19th century that sport was seriously rehabilitated by Christians. Originating in the revival of athleticism in public schools of the Victorian era, the movement known as 'Muscular Christianity' embraced sport on the grounds that it "moralised the populace". It was argued that sport produced discipline and virtue in its participants.¹⁸ This view was closely associated with religion, with similar sentiments taking expression in Scotland in the Boys' Brigade movement, for example.

More recently, some have argued that, while competition can elevate the character of those who are involved, it can also serve to debase it. As evidence they point to some of the sports scandals of the last decades, the constant pressures on athletes to enhance their performance through all possible means, or the sectarian attitudes which can build up around sporting events. In this report, we suggest that those involved in competitive sport should consider how they conduct themselves.

Today, sport is an important part of Scottish culture at all levels and remains an important element of the life of many churches in Scotland. Many churches, for example, use sport as part of their outreach and mission to their local communities.

3. Competitiveness

The word 'competition' comes from the Latin *com* and *petere* and has the root meaning of '*striving together*'. This is exemplified in team sports, but even in individual sports, the person who competes may be surrounded by the efforts of other people, such as coaches, psychologists, physiotherapists,

¹⁷ The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2, A Cleveland Coxe ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), III.X, pp. 283-284. Cf. III.XI.

¹⁸ Erdozain D (2010) *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

the scientists who developed the equipment, fans etc. Sport is something that we play, not only as individuals but also *together with others*.

However, those who compete also strive together *against* their opponents and seek to out-perform them. From amateur to professional, many who are engaged in sporting competition invest enormous commitment, energy and time in their endeavours to strive against their opponents so they can reap the achievement they desire. Hence, the etymology of 'competition' has journeyed from its original Latin meaning of '*striving together*' to '*striving against*'. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes an image of striving, both *together* and *against*, in his metaphor of the parts of the body so as to highlight the essential nature of our interconnectedness and interdependence:

*'Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many....God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose....As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.'*¹⁹

In this report, we argue that both '*striving together*' and '*striving against*' are integral to competitiveness. The worship of God sets such competition within the context of the commands to love God with our all heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our minds, to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves. Sporting competition as simply *striving against* is vital but one-dimensional. It lacks the *striving together* with God alongside and within us as the invisible Holy Spirit. Perhaps sport is at its best when competitors *strive together*, with God and their human supporters, pushing themselves so as to perform to the best of their abilities fairly within the rules without gamesmanship, in their *striving against* their opponent. Competitiveness, when seen in this way, comprises both forms of striving.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:14-22

The British sprinter, Christine Ohuruogu, describes how her Christian faith influences her sense of competitiveness and her relationship with those against whom she competes.

“I think having faith in God allows you to be a lot more gracious. Much as you want to beat your competitors, you have a more human way of looking at people, and respecting them. Jesus said we were to love our neighbours – even the ones who don’t necessarily like us and we find hard to like.”

Christine Ohuruogu, interview with J Stuart Weir (2011), cited in Glasgow Penny Bible, NIV, Scottish Bible Society, More than Gold, Biblica.

The immediate context may be that competition produces a contest to entertain and inspire others to play and, or emulate sporting play. The bigger picture of 'loving God and neighbour' is the ultimate context in which we *strive against* and *strive together*. We can affirm *striving against* someone to win and *striving together* with God towards the higher goal of God's glory, which does not necessarily always involve winning the game. Indeed some of the most inspirational performances in, for example, marathons, come from participants for whom simply completing the event is a triumph over adversity.

Whether winning or losing, playing sport provides a range of social, physical and cognitive benefits. It can encourage a sense of belonging, co-operation and teamwork. It also fosters self-control, persistence, self-discipline and a sense of right and wrong, and gives opportunities to enjoy success and learn to accept disappointment, as well as teaching split-second decision-making and strategic thinking.

We believe that all involved in competitive sport, whether individual competitors, team mates, opponents, coaches, fans or officials, should be guided in all that they do by Jesus' words from the Sermon of the Mount in his commandment:

‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.’²⁰

In playing out this instruction, the imperative for our conduct in playing or spectating sporting competition is to respect as we would be respected, play by the rules as we would have our opponents do, celebrate victory or empathise with those whom we have defeated, applauding them where warranted. Competitiveness between individuals or teams, where there is mutual respect and a sense of fair play, is healthy and enjoyable, portrays '*striving together*' and '*striving against*' as positive and complementary forces.

²⁰ Matthew 7:12

4. Winning and Losing

Winning and losing are relative concepts. They mean different things at different times and for different people. Winning can represent huge personal success, be that when striving against a tough opponent, when beating one's previous performance, or simply when staying the course and crossing the finishing line. The thrill and sense of satisfaction in achieving ones goal is a major part of the reward for a game well played after what may have been months of sacrifice and gruelling training. However it may be that on the day despite playing well, the opponent's performance is superior and wins the competition. Is there anything to be ashamed of in that? Equally, a competitor might play really badly and win because the quality of the opposition was low. Is there much to be pleased about in that?

There is a beautiful story of a young man with a disability who wanted to win the Special Olympics; he got to the hundred meter race and was running like crazy to get the gold medal. One of the others running with him slipped and fell; he turned round and picked him up and they ran across the finishing line together last. Are we prepared to sacrifice the prize for solidarity? It's a big question. Do we want to be in solidarity with others? ... We have to look at the poorest and the weakest. They have a message to give us.

Vanier J. (2008). Essential Writings, p 167-68. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

There is something beautifully subversive about this story, which challenges our view of winning and losing in a world where Jesus said the

*first will be last, and the last will be first*²¹.

Genesis presents God as the creator of all things. Of the creation the writer adds

*'...God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good'*²².

Sport is part of God's creation and is therefore in itself good. When sport becomes tainted by the unfair play and cheating that can characterise an unhealthy obsession with winning, it is human beings who bring sin to sport²³.

²¹ Matt 19: 30

²² Genesis 1:31.

What really matters in competitive sport is not the public assessment of our performance as 'winners' or 'losers' but that we are responsible for pleasing God first, before everyone else. It is to praise and thank the God who gave us our lives and our ability - indeed, our 'God-given talent' - to compete and to play sport. In the film *Chariots of Fire* Eric Liddell, the 1924 Olympic gold medallist, exclaimed that,

'God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast and when I run, I feel his pleasure.'

We are ultimately to play for an audience of one and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Whether victorious or not, God loves both equally.

Where the emotional reaction of winners and their supporters may be that of intense happiness and exhilaration, those who are defeated can experience feelings ranging from disappointment to deep despair and shame. It may take time to come to terms with losing the competition but defeat can provide valuable lessons for future performance and indeed for life in general.

Losing the competition may not be the only loss experienced. Some competitors may feel that in losing a contest, they have also lost face and even that their sense of identity and perceived status are diminished. In the case of the professional, there may well also be financial loss. Kirsty Balfour, the Scottish swimmer, describes how she felt after competing in the 2008 Beijing Olympic championships and how her faith sustained her.

²³ http://www.veritesport.org/downloads/theology_of_sport/Competition_as_Relationship.pdf, accessed on 09/01/14.

Kirsty Balfour went to the Beijing Olympics as a medal contender. In the previous two years she had won World Championship silver, European gold and Commonwealth silver medals in the 200 metres breaststroke. If she could repeat her time from the Commonwealth Games of 2:24:04, she would be among the medal winners. In the event, her time in the heat was three seconds slower than her best time. She did not even make the semi-finals. She said,

'I was trying my best but I didn't feel sharp and I didn't feel I could pick up my pace or adjust to what other people were doing.'

Four years preparation for the Olympics had just gone up in smoke. Tears flowed.

'I felt very confused and disappointed. I had just wanted to do a good swim for the team, for the country, for my family. My first thought was of people I had let down, like sponsors, my family, who had flown out to China to watch me, and my coach and my team mates. So I just felt I had let people down – all the money and the time that had been invested in working towards Beijing was gone.'

As a follower of Jesus Christ from childhood, Kirsty had reason to ask where was God in all this? Why had God allowed it all to happen? Why had it all gone wrong when it really mattered? Yet in the midst of all the turmoil, Kirsty had a great sense of God's presence.

"As I waited poolside, the words of a song kept coming into my mind. 'How great is our God', and there is a line that says, 'He is the name above all names and is worthy to be praised. My heart will sing: how great is our God'.

"My mind was a great mix of thoughts but that song was still in my head and I thought, 'Yes God is still God and he is worthy to be praised'. It was amazing to have that and after what I had been through I felt I was standing on the rock of Jesus. I was able to say 'Yes, Jesus you are in it. You are here. This was your will'. I had such assurance that God still loved me".

As she looks back at Beijing, the memory is still painful. She would have loved to have won a medal to celebrate with her family and team. But she does not see Beijing as a failure because she had given her all. She adds,

"Sometimes when it goes badly, God gets more glory in your reaction and in how you handle it than in winning a medal".

Where is God when it all went wrong? He was right with her.

Written by J Stuart Weir in Sports Good News Bible, The Bible Societies/Collins, 2012, Pages 30-31

One might question whether, even in elite sport, the 'winner takes all' philosophy is appropriate. In the Olympic Games can you really call the silver medallist a loser? And what of the athlete who runs a personal best time yet doesn't finish in a medal position? A competitor who is generous in defeat, having been beaten by a worthy opponent during a competition in which he or she has played to their best, likewise gains much respect and admiration.

5. Relationships

Relationships in sports are multi-faceted. For example sportspeople have families and friends, and many are introduced to and supported in their chosen sport by teachers and club coaches. They interact with opponents and, in team sports, with fellow team members, fans and sponsors. The Bible has much to say about relationships and how we should conduct ourselves within them. In this section we examine some of the issues which can affect various interpersonal relationships.

5.1 Family Matters

An involvement in any level of competitive sport affects the whole family; basking in the reflected glory at times of success and sharing in the disappointment when victory is not to be. The exhilaration, pride and joy in knowing that the acclamation resounding around the sports hall or stadium is for your partner, child or sibling provides a moment rarely experienced. The burdens may sometimes seem to outweigh the benefits but at the moment of glory all will be forgotten and each and every family member will reflect that it was all worthwhile. It is the culmination of much that has gone before. Having selected the competitive route in a chosen sport, they have achieved their goal, a goal that may be the climax of their intentions or only a stepping stone to greater aspirations.

The partner of a sportsman or woman should not underestimate the time and commitment that may have to be devoted to his or her loved one's chosen sport, and may have to forgo opportunities to engage in other pursuits, both individually and together. They will need patience and compassion while their partner is experiencing difficult situations in their training schedule. They may be ambitious for them to achieve and yet must be wary of putting too much pressure on them. They will need to console at times of disappointment but will share the happiness of achievement and appreciate that effort brings success.

Most parents are aware of the many advantages which can be gained from encouraging children to participate in sport and physical activity. Sport has real potential in helping to teach children vital character-building life lessons, including encouraging self-confidence, developing discipline, setting

targets and working as part of a team. It also teaches the value of working hard to achieve success, as well as the important lesson of accepting defeat graciously. However, many are also aware that, in seeking to encourage youngsters, it is easy to begin to push boundaries. In their competitive zeal, for example, parents have been known to shout abuse at officials or opponents from the side-lines, making them poor role models for their children. In extreme cases they may even threaten or resort to violence. The pressure from parents on young people to push themselves and to win at all costs may be detrimental, or may lead to parents criticising their children or deriding them for making a mistake during a game. Parents and others who support young people in sport should retain a sense of perspective and uphold high standards of behaviour both on the pitch and the side-lines.

Siblings naturally compete with each other in many areas of life and sports can magnify this natural sibling rivalry. When siblings are involved in sports, especially the same sports, they compete for praise and attention from parents and others. Although they may at first be inspired by their talented brother or sister, their understanding may be tinged with jealousy of the sibling's prowess and they may become resentful of all the attention being given to their brother or sister. This can lead to conflict and other issues arising in family life - a possibility to which parents need to be attuned. It is possible that the imbalance in attention is more perceived than real, but even so it is possible for tensions within families to be generated. Giving equal attention to each sibling and praise for effort rather than outcome can help to prevent the negative effects of such rivalry.

In striving together as a family, fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, partners, sisters and brothers often sacrifice time, money, friendships and perhaps even the quality of their relationships when striving against conflicting emotions. These sacrifices are usually appreciated but paradoxically may add to athletes' pressure, particularly when they fail to achieve the success for which they had hoped, as Kirsty Balfour so clearly articulated (see Case Study 3).

Although not referring specifically to sport in his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul described graphically the expressions of loving support from family members experienced by many talented athletes:

*'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'*²⁴

²⁴ I Cor 13: 4- 7

5.2 Supporters

Sports fans are characterised by their enthusiastic support for their chosen athlete or team, regularly attending competitions or viewing them on television. They gain the companionship of others who share their passion, and sense of identity and belonging as they *strive together* to encourage their team as they *strive against* each other. They join together in celebrating successes but can be quick to voice displeasure when their idols fail to fulfil their hopes and expectations. There is a clear distinction too, between the positive feelings coming from spectators joining in support of their team and the negative feelings when they unite in animosity to the opposition, inciting in extreme situations a mob mentality that can lead to hooliganism and sectarianism.

Evidence suggests an increase in such violence following some football matches²⁵. Davis describes this phenomenon of hegemonic fandom as *'spiteful aggression ... typically directed with special venom at one particular rival'*²⁶. Such expressions of sectarianism are not confined to religious differences: Davis notes that much football fan behaviour is highly ritualised with differences between neighbourhoods, cities or countries being deliberately exaggerated for ritual purposes.

Such behaviour runs counter to the way that Jesus teaches us act towards each other. Instead, He calls us to love one another, loving our neighbour who may also be our enemy, as ourselves, and to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. This means striving against feelings of hatred and becoming reconciled to the fact that we are all loved equally as God's children.

5.3 Team mates

The qualities of trust, reliability, enthusiasm, commitment and the ability to collaborate are all attributes of good team players. There is little room within the team for individuals to take the limelight on the field. Instead, team players need to understand when to take the initiative and when to allow others to take centre stage for the benefit of the team endeavour.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul again uses the analogy of the inter-relationship of the parts of the body to show the importance of co-operative action:

²⁵ Williams D.J., F.G. Neville, K. House and P.D. Donnelly. (2013) Association Between Old Firm Football Matches and Reported Domestic (Violence) Incidents in Strathclyde, Scotland. 1Sage Open, 1-7. <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/3/3/2158244013504207.full.pdf+html>, accessed 16/10/13.

²⁶ Davis P. (2013), in Flint J and Kelly J (Eds.). Bigotry, Football and Scotland. Edinburgh University Press.

*'from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.'*²⁷

As well as competition against the opposition, there can, however, be competition within the team - competition to be in the starting line-up; competition for a new contract. The dynamics of a sports team are complex, with a great sense of team when they play but, perhaps particularly in professional sport, with equally fierce competition between squad members for a place in the team.

5.4 The Coach

The coach–athlete relationship is dynamic and complex, irrespective of whether at amateur or professional level but is nonetheless also one of *striving together*. Coaching draws on sport psychology, the aim being to assist the athlete to master such personal qualities as confidence, self-reliance, determination and leadership, as well as sporting prowess²⁸. It is the role of the coach to encourage and inspire, helping their protégé to minimise the risks from injury, motivating them to endure harrowing training, developing their techniques and challenging them to push their limits so as to perform to the best of their abilities. They teach them how to deal with both success and disappointment. Out of competition, where the athlete is a child or a young person the coach can be a mentor, offering an adult perspective on a range of issues. Similarly for older athletes the coach can be a sounding board or confidante. The outcomes from positive coaching relationships are not limited to competitive performance but are manifest in terms of psychological health and well-being. On the other hand, the relationship can be undermined by deceit, exploitation and even physical or sexual abuse²⁹.

Training for coaches is regulated by Sports Coach UK which helps ensure that coaching from appropriately trained personnel is available to both children and adults at all levels in sport and all coaches in Scotland must undergo the process of Disclosure Scotland Protecting Vulnerable Groups

²⁷ Ephesians 4: 16.

²⁸ Jowett, S. *The coach-athlete partnership*. *The psychologist*, 18: 412-415. (2005) http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/archive/archive_home.cfm/volumeID_18-editionID_125-ArticleID_895-getfile_getPDF/thepsychologist/0705jowe.pdf

²⁹ Marks, S., M. Mountjoy, M. Madalyn. Sexual harassment and abuse in sport: the role of the team doctor *Br J Sports Med* 46: 905-908 (2012) <http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/46/13/905.full.pdf+html>

(PVG) checking. While we feel that it is important that coaches should address the ethical dimension of competition, this may be an area where sports chaplains could complement their role.

5.5 The Sports Chaplain

Over the last three years the number of chaplains in Scottish football has trebled, with at least 37 of 42 senior clubs involving a chaplain in pastoral support for their staff, players and supporters, with other sports like rugby now following suit.

While coaches and team mates are intent on training and tactics towards sporting success, chaplains are concerned with the holistic wellbeing of people in sport, befriending and helping players to perform to the best of their ability, yet recognising that there is more to life than winning, adulation and money. Indirectly, the chaplain can foster the kind of positive attitude that will enhance performance, but it is the inner world of a sports person's soul, spirit, character and their relationships with God, self and others, which are the sports chaplain's focus. Whether one has a religious faith or not, chaplains can help people to recognise the importance of prioritising esteem, love, and hope over vanity and the ephemeral pleasures of fame and celebrity status.

Coach Joe Ehrmann, in his book, 'Inside Out Coaching' describes two types of coaching³⁰: transactional and transformational. Transactional coaching is purely functional: 'perform well and you get rewarded, but play badly or fail to deliver success, you will get dropped and discarded. This is the raw world of competitive sport that can breed a 'win at all costs' mentality. 'Transformational' coaching seeks to encourage strong self-esteem which translates as positive performances. Here there is scope for misunderstanding and tension between coach and chaplain. A chaplain's attempts to help a player explore the inner life of grace and esteem can be construed as 'softening' or 'weakening' a competitive streak or blunting a ruthless determination to win.

One chaplain to an English Premiership football team tells how he was called into the manager's office. The manager was concerned that a player, who had recently become a Christian, might lose his competitive edge. The chaplain was able to assure him that this should not be the case and that, in fact, such a deepening of the player's inner life and connecting with a higher power would likely heighten his performance.

³⁰ Ehrmann J (2011) Inside Out Coaching: How sports can transform lives. Simon and Schuster, New York.

5.6 The Opponent

An opponent is just another person, or a team of people, also striving to perform to the best of their ability to win a contest. As competitors we should treat our opponents in the way that we want to be treated: with respect. It is about wanting a fair game, a good contest. It is about wanting the best for our opponent, in order to get the best out of ourselves, namely *striving together*. It is about playing hard but not seeking an unfair advantage.

Book review of "Now and Then, This and That" by Logie Bruce-Lockhart, and includes an account of a rugby match between Scotland and France in 1947:

"Scotland's Keith Geddes and a French back chased after then dived for the ball as it crossed the Scottish line. The referee had not quite caught up with the play ... but felt that the benefit of the doubt should go to the defending side, Scotland. He was in the process of signalling a drop-out when Keith Geddes stopped him and told him that the French wing had definitely beaten him to the touch down and that he must signal a try. The referee changed his mind and awarded a try to the French. If that had happened in the 21st century, Keith would have been shunned by his team and dropped by the selectors. ... The match was lost 8-3."

(Scotsman sports section, 21 October 2013).

Drew Hyland³¹ argues that "the highest version of competition is as friendship" because friends are always pushing each other to be the best they can be. He notes that people are often at their most competitive while playing against a close friend, and that,

'this greater intensity enhances rather than diminishes the positive strength of the relationship.'

Going back to the derivation of the word, he further argues for competition whereby:

'each participant achieved a level of excellence that could not have been achieved alone, without the mutual striving, without the competition.'

In Hebrews 10 we are encouraged to

'consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds'³².

³¹ Hyland D. (1978) Competition and Friendship. *Journal of Philosophy of Sport*. Vol V: 27-38 (1979). Also published in E.W. Gerber & W.J. Morgan (Eds.), *Sport and The Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, 2nd Edition, Philadelphia, Lea & Febiger, 1979

³² Hebrews 10: 24.

This idea of encouragement to excel, and to do so for mutual benefit, translates well to the context of competition. It suggests that opponents motivate each other to rise to the challenge of the contest while playing fairly and respecting each other.

Nduka Odizor, a quarter-finalist at Wimbledon in the early 1980s, was able to witness to an opponent in a very practical way.

“I was playing the qualifying round of a grass tournament in Holland when I noticed my next opponent was upset about something. I overheard him say that he had been unable to get a pair of grass court shoes and as a result he was slipping all over the place. I offered to lend him a pair of mine.

“My opponent’s face dropped in astonishment. The thought, ‘How could anyone be so stupid?’ was written all over his face. ‘Here’s my hotel key,’ I said, ‘if you want to go and get them or send someone for them.’

“When our match was called, there he was, wearing my shoes! He won the first set, but I came back to win the next two. At the end he couldn’t say thank you enough. He was so sincere. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before”.

Serving to Win, Tennis Ministry Newsletter, Fall 1990

Love Game, Fritz Glaus with Mike Yorkey, Levita Media, 2012, Pages 130-32

In Case Study 4, we find a wonderful example of one competitor doing a good deed to his opponent.

5.7 Sponsors

Sport at all levels can benefit from sponsorship. It takes several forms, from the provision of kit for the local football team in exchange for having the company logo on the players’ shirts to the multi-million pound corporate sponsorship of elite sport. While there are obvious advantages to both parties, recipients need to be clear about the commitment that they are making. Sponsorship contracts are generally dealt with by the player’s club or, at the elite level, by an agent.

Sportsmen and women may experience dilemmas over endorsing products which they feel are unethical. Whilst sponsorship by tobacco companies ended in 2005, no such ban applies to the alcohol industry. The prevalence of sponsorship of sport from the gambling industry and payday loan companies is a concern to many, given the social evils caused by excessive gambling and the insidious harm caused by payday lending. There have been some encouraging signs of a backlash against

payday loan company involvement, such as the campaign by English football fans against advertising on club websites³³. However sponsorship of individual clubs continues to be a concern. While we welcome public funding for sport, we call for more philanthropic sources of funding and sponsorship.

6. Money matters

*'And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'*³⁴

Money has a powerful influence on the potential for success in sport. The position of teams in the English Premier Football League is directly proportionate to their annual wage bill³⁵, and recent problems at Glasgow Rangers and Heart of Midlothian highlight the damaging impact of poor financial management even at the largest of clubs. Money also has its effect on the global arena where athletes from poorer countries aspiring to participate at world class level lack suitable training facilities and appropriate equipment, infringing the principle of equal opportunity.

Increasingly football clubs are more akin to big business than a town or city football club, with many floated on the stock exchange or bankrolled by billionaire owners. While teams in the top leagues have money to buy the best players and so maintain their position; those in lower leagues with less money have fewer such opportunities, thus restricting their chances of promotion to a higher league which would attract increased attendance at matches and greater television rights.

The lucrative contracts between television networks and selected sports brings media exposure and fame for star performers, with an increasing number of sportspeople being included in the annually published 'Rich List' – notably footballers, golfers, tennis players and motor-racing drivers. In some, coping with such riches has given rise to personal difficulties, while others who seek to achieve the trappings of success may be tempted to engage in unsportsmanlike behaviours that demean themselves, their team-mates, coaches, family members and their chosen sport. Trusting in God helps us to resist temptation; since Jesus himself was tempted, he is able to help us when tempted³⁶. Those who achieve fame and fortune do well to remember words of Timothy:

³³<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/jun/18/football-league-wonga-advertising>, accessed 12.12.2013.

³⁴ Philippians 4:19

³⁵ Anderson C. and D. Sally. (2013) *The Numbers Game*, London Penguin/Viking.

³⁶ Hebrews 2: 18.

*'As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.'*³⁷

In recent years there has been a marked increase in sponsorship, particularly of football, from commercial gambling companies³⁸. There has been a parallel increase in gambling in the general population. Gambling can lead to problem gambling.

Problem gamblers have great difficulty limiting the amount of time and money they spend gambling. This is likely to lead to severe financial problems and breakdown in family and social relationships. Such problems may be compounded as debts build up and people become vulnerable to seeking loans from unscrupulous sources. This in turn can cause stress and associated health problems³⁹, and may lead to suicide⁴⁰. It has been suggested that there are 284,000 problem gamblers in the UK⁴¹.

Gambling also has consequences for sportspeople, such as the 2010 Pakistan/ England cricket series and the players who succumbed to the temptation of easy money and damaged their careers as a result. There are also persistent accusations in some sports of matches being 'fixed' on the direction of the gambling fraternity. Indeed compulsive gambling is currently the most common form of addiction in sports people in the UK⁴², with some resorting to taking out short-term (pay-day) loans to fund their addiction⁴³. Due to its hidden nature, problem gambling often goes undetected in its early stages.

The British Gambling Survey shows that those who spend most time and greatest amounts of money are more likely to live in areas of greatest deprivation, live in low income households and be

³⁷ 1 Timothy 6: 17

³⁸ Danson A *Legal and regulatory update Sponsorship by gambling companies in the UK and Europe: The opportunities and challenges*. Journal of Sponsorship. 3: 194 – 201. (2010)

³⁹ Black D., and M. Shaw: *Psychiatric Comorbidity Associated With Pathological Gambling*". Psychiatric Times 25 (12). (2008). <http://pro.psychcentral.com/2010/psychiatric-comorbidity-associated-with-pathological-gambling/00184.html#>, accessed 15.05.2013.

⁴⁰ Griffiths, M. D. (2004) Betting your life on it: problem gambling has clear health-related consequences. *British Medical Journal*, 329, 1055–1056.

⁴¹ Wardle, H., K. Proton, J. Oxford, B. Ernes, M. Griffiths, R. Constantine and S. Piggott: British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007 (<http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/British%20Gambling%20Prevalence%20Survey%202007%20-%20Sept%202007.pdf>) and <http://www.sportingchanceclinic.com/education-training/gambling> .

⁴² <http://www.sportingchanceclinic.com/education-training/gambling/>, accessed 4/10/2013.

⁴³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/24648539>, accessed on 25.10.13

unemployed⁴⁴. Those who engage in gambling, therefore, are among the most economically vulnerable in our society. At a time of economic hardship this is yet another area where the poorest are most at risk.

7. Equality issues

The opportunity to be involved as a participant or as a supporter in sports is wide. Typing into an internet search engine, '*How many sports are there in the world?*', gives answers that range from forty-one to over eight thousand. There are team sports, individual sports, sports on snow, in the air, in, on and under water, on roads, cliff faces, trampolines, and grass to name but a few. Most sports can be played at any level, from that of the novice to the elite professional. Opportunities exist, therefore, for most people to take part in sport in some way, irrespective of natural talent or ability.

Despite all being equal members of God's family, inequality exists for example, between men's and women's sport, in opportunities for people from different socio-economic sectors of society, in disability sport, and in ethnicity.

While women's sport in Britain has never been stronger with role models such as Tanni Grey-Thompson, Jessica Ennis, Sarah Storey, Kirsty Balfour, Eilidh Child and Catriona Matthew, a number of challenges remain for women in sport. There is inequality in earnings between the genders. Compare, for example, footballer Gary Neville and his sister Tracey the netball player, both of whom have played for England for the same number of times. Gary became a multi-millionaire through his sport, whereas Tracey had to pay to play. Wimbledon is very much an exception, where there is equal prize money for men and women. Generally, the amount paid to sports men and women is proportionate to the revenue generated by the sport. The Women's Fitness and Sport Foundation report that women's sport receives a mere 0.5% of commercial sponsorship⁴⁵. Such imbalance perpetuates the lack of opportunity for talented girls and women to excel.

While we welcome the fact that there are an increasing number of opportunities for girls to participate in all sports, there is a perception that they are encouraged to take part only in 'girly' sports and are largely excluded from football, rugby and contact sports such as the martial arts. Indeed, while men will have opportunities to compete in both rugby sevens and boxing at the Commonwealth Games Glasgow 2014, women will not. For such sports there are only a few clubs where girls can access appropriate coaching and training.

⁴⁴ <http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/British%20Gambling%20Prevalence%20Survey%202010.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.wsff.org.uk/the-challenge/the-challenge-elite-sportswomen>, accessed 23/10/2013.

The emergence of role models, such as Katie Taylor who won gold in the lightweight division at the London 2012 Olympics, will help break the stereotype. As a committed Christian, Katie's ritual before every fight includes praying and reading a Bible verse. The verse chosen from Isaiah for the Olympic final was telling her not to focus on who was standing opposite her in the ring, but to focus on the God whom she believes is always standing beside her, both in and out of the ring⁴⁶.

Competitive sport may not be deemed to be 'cool' for teenage girls in the way it is for boys. The cultural pressures on young girls to appear fashionable and trendy and certainly not hot and sweaty, may discourage them from active involvement in sport.

More women leaders at all levels are needed to inspire and encourage girls to see competitive sport as something for them. It is noteworthy that only 21 of the 101 active members of the International Olympic Committee are women. The film "Bend it like Beckham" highlighted the issue of inherent prejudice in some cultures against girls participating in what are traditionally viewed as men's sports. Those from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are significantly less likely to participate in sport, particularly at club level, than their white counterparts⁴⁷. There is also under-representation of BME groups in official positions and sports administration.

The 2012 London Paralympics showcased disability sport in an unprecedented way. However, much more needs to be done. UK Sport, keen to build on the achievements of 2012 has allocated £71Million to the British Paralympic Association for the 2016 Rio Paralympics campaign, an increase of 43% on the 2012 Paralympic funding⁴⁸. While this is good news, events like the Deaflympics and the Special Olympics operate on much smaller budgets.

For people with a disability participation can have a rehabilitative influence on physical health and social lives, reducing stigma and discrimination. A disabled woman's participation challenges double discrimination in gender stereotypes and prejudices about disability.

There is also a strong link between disability and poverty⁴⁹, with disabled people experiencing disproportionate social, political and economic exclusion⁵⁰. In many countries there is little or no access for disabled people to appropriate sports facilities or technological aids, such as sports wheelchairs, prostheses or tandem bicycles for the visually impaired. Opportunities to compete are compromised by insufficient funding, not only to train but also to travel. The ambitions of many to

⁴⁶Taylor K. (2012) My Olympic Dream, Simon & Schuster.

⁴⁷<http://www.sportingequals.org.uk/PICS/BME%20Final%20Full%20%20Report.pdf>, accessed 25.10.13.

⁴⁸<http://www.uksport.gov.uk/sport/summer-2016>

⁴⁹ <http://www.trickleup.org/poverty/disability-inclusion.cfm>, accessed 2.11.13.

⁵⁰<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/disability-facts-and-figures.php>, accessed 2.11.13.

reach world competition level are never realised, with only a very few having the chance to take part on the world stage.

Equality is one of the three values that underpin the philosophy of the Commonwealth Games Federation, the organisation responsible for Games. The organisers have pledged that there will be *'greater opportunities for female and Para-Sport athletes Glasgow 2014 will offer more events and medal opportunities for Para-Sport athletes than any Commonwealth Games in history'*⁵¹. While such progress is to be welcomed, equality of opportunity at ground level, particularly for disabled athletes, still has some way to go.

8. Technology and Science

The desire to win pushes competitors and the industry which supports elite performers to maximise performance through a variety of means. This includes the development of equipment and clothing; fitness, training and evolution/improvement of techniques; tactics and psychology; or through physiological means such as training at high altitude to maximise the oxygen carrying power of the body.

Sporting governing bodies define the allowable limits that are relevant to their specific sports. Equipment modification is generally strictly controlled and deviation from the norm can result in great debate and controversy. This latter point is highlighted by incidents relating to equipment used by disabled competitors e.g. Alan Oliveira's blades in 2012 Paralympics.

Whether it be carbon fibre tennis rackets, rugby shirts which are made of material designed to be more difficult to grasp, or a swim suit with bumps on it to mimic the skin of a shark to improve aquadynamic performance, many of these begin life in the lab, with science and technology playing a major part. Engineering has enabled mechanical improvements to be made to racing bikes, Formula 1 cars and equipment used by disabled athletes, such as sports wheelchairs, thereby enhancing the competitive edge of those who are able to access such resources.

The ability to measure and conduct computerised analysis of all aspects of performance, or of blood samples following training or exertion, means that small but significant improvements can be made. Technologies such as ultrasound can decrease healing time following injury and specialised equipment such as weights machines or ergometers can increase muscle strength and stamina with obvious competitive advantage. The lack of such facilities in developing countries has undoubted consequences for the ability of many talented athletes to achieve to their full potential, but lack of

⁵¹ <http://www.glasgow2014.com/press-releases/glasgow-2014-sports-programme-finalised>, accessed 30.10.13.

access to specialised facilities may also present challenges for those, for example, in remote and rural Scotland or from a deprived urban area.

Science and technology have also influenced competitive performance through developments in our understanding of human physiology. Effects similar to those experienced by people who live at high altitude can be achieved by using equipment adapted from the oxygen concentrator that was originally developed for people who needed oxygen at home. Whereas the oxygen concentrator used in medicine adjusts the gas concentrations of air to increase it, the 'altitude tent' used by athletes is a sealed unit in which the occupant inhales oxygen-depleted air.

While training at altitude and using altitude tents are allowed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), blood doping, which aims to achieve a similar effect by boosting the number of oxygen-carrying red blood cells through blood transfusion or substitutes, is prohibited. The ability to use genetics to change or improve competitive performance, 'gene doping' is an area of interest to many, although the technology is thought to be not yet available. Nutritional supplements are heavily promoted in certain sporting circles and, provided they do not contain any of the banned chemicals, are permitted.

It is likely that drugs have been used in competitive arenas since such substances became available and thought to confer some advantage. In the recent past, the use, and abuse, of drugs has been widely deployed and, while current sensitive analytical techniques make it difficult to evade detection, WADA is involved in a constant struggle to stay ahead of those who try to gain competitive advantage through the use of these banned substances.

Even out of competition, athletes have to be careful about what medicines they take to treat illnesses such as a cold in case they contain substances which are considered illegal. The use of drugs which in other contexts would be deemed to be for medicinal purposes, for example beta blockers, used in the past to diminish physiological tremor in sports such as rifle shooting, snooker or golf, can also be problematic.

There is a fine line between the legitimate use of physiological, technological and psychological strategies to gain advantage and those which infringe both legal and morally acceptable practice. The WADA publishes an annual list of substances and methods which are prohibited for participants in competitive sport⁵². Some substances are allowed out of competition but must not be detectable above certain levels in samples taken at a competitive event. It may also be permissible for some prohibited substance to be taken under a 'Therapeutic Use Exemption' when the medicine is

⁵²<http://www.wada-ama.org/en/World-Anti-Doping-Program/Sports-and-Anti-Doping-Organizations/International-Standards/Prohibited-List/>

required to treat an illness or condition. However, the practice of using permitted analgesics to mask pain in the short term so that competitors can continue to play at the expense of their long term health must be condemned.

Using banned substances not only carries health risks for the competitor but also constitutes a form of cheating, giving unfair competitive advantage. It brings disappointment to all who have supported the athlete, disrespect for those who have been involved in the decision to follow this path and defiles the very name of sport. While debate concerning what is permissible in sport continues⁵³, the Christian competitor must be aware that there is a way to play sport that is consistent with the Bible's teachings and a way that is not. Journalist George Will commented that:

*'Athletes who are chemically propelled to victory do not merely overvalue winning ... it becomes a display of the chemist's [scientist's, engineer's] virtuosity and the athlete's bad character. ... The athlete's proper goal is to perform unusually well, not unnaturally well'*⁵⁴

Instead, we should rejoice in all the different talents and abilities God has given us. It is not for us to change what God has given, rather we have a duty to use them to the best of our abilities, giving thanks and placing our trust in God. As Jesus has told us:

*He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear... Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"*⁵⁵

Sports pastor and coach Greg Linville has suggested the concept 'Christmanship', which embodies the best of sporting behaviour (fun, fairness and being gracious in defeat) with competitiveness (giving one's best effort to win) but transcends and surpasses them both. Linville challenges the Christian athlete to compete as Christ would⁵⁶. This means, among other things, rejecting the use of any means of gaining unfair advantage, whether by playing mind games, calculated rule-bending, using performance enhancing substances or other kinds of cheating.

Paul writes,

*"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities"*⁵⁷

⁵³ *Performance enhancement: Superhuman athletes*. H. Thompson. Nature 487: 287–289 (2012)

⁵⁴ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45510-2004Dec7.html>. Zeiger, H. (2008) The Mitchell Report: Christian Response to Steroids in Sports: http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217851/k.C75A/The_Mitchell_Report accessed 17.10.13.

⁵⁵ Luke 12: 22, 32.

⁵⁶ Linville G., Christmanship- The Theology of Competition and Sport, Oliver House Publishing, In press, 2013.

⁵⁷ Romans 13: 1

This scripture puts an obligation on Christian athletes to observe the rules and regulations of the sport, including observing which substances can be taken and which may not. The obligation to love one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:31) requires competitors, coaches, officials and supporters to seek a fair contest and not to try to take advantage of an opponent unfairly. We are reminded in 2 Timothy that:

*'And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.'*⁵⁸

Moreover, the words which we need to carry with us at all times and seem to be especially relevant in this context are from the Lord's Prayer,

*'And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.'*⁵⁹

9. Sport, Social Justice and Peace

At its best, sport has the potential to contribute to social justice, playing a valuable role in fostering inclusion and building strong community relationships. At its worst, it can divide and heighten tensions.

Sport and education programmes have been involved in peace-making work in many places including the Balkans, the Middle East, West Africa, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and South Africa⁶⁰. Few political leaders have understood or been more committed to the potential of sport more than Nelson Mandela. Sport, Mandela said,

*'has the power... to unite people in a way that little else does'*⁶¹.

'It speaks to youth in a language they understand' and 'it can create hope where once there was only despair'. The staging of rugby (1995) cricket (2003) and football (2010) World Cups were all seen as making a contribution to rebuilding and reconciliation within South Africa.

In Scotland the ugly face of sectarianism has been associated with football, and a recent study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that, despite significant progress made in past years, sport continues to face a number of challenges across member states

⁵⁸ 2 Timothy 2: 5

⁵⁹ Matthew 6: 13

⁶⁰ Jarvie, G. (2013). *War, peace and a new world paved with good intentions through sport*. E-international Relations. <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/01/29/war-peace-and-a-new-world-paved-with-good-intentions-through-sport/>.

⁶¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/2327308/Nelson-Mandela-plan-to-tap-into-TV-millions.html>

related to racism and ethnic discrimination⁶². The Church and Society Council has already highlighted this as an area of concern in Scotland and has pointed to a number of initiatives, including church-based projects that are addressing this issue⁶³.

Youth unemployment can have long lasting, debilitating, economic and socially corrosive effects. Whilst sustainable levels of employment would address many of these problems, other levers such as participation in sport, have the potential to make a difference. The work of the charity *Fight for Peace* in Rio de Janeiro exists to realise the potential of young people living in communities affected by violence and crime. Boxing and martial arts are at the heart of grass-roots interventions that have improved the lives of many in the favelas. Sport Plus programmes are helping to deliver alternatives to crime and violence, with 84% of members reporting that they are less likely to be involved in crime⁶⁴. *'Enough is Enough'* is an initiative that uses sport and art to tackle gang culture in a borough in Essex. According to the Guardian, preliminary results suggest that in the two years since the programme started gun crime has reduced by one third and knife assaults by a quarter⁶⁵.

The complexity of such issues has been illustrated in the recent protests in Brazil. In a country in which 21% of the population lives below the poverty line, the costs of hosting the FIFA 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics are being brought into question. The message from Brazil seems to be that world sporting events are overwhelmingly benefiting some people while there is little material benefit for others.

10. Competing for time: Church or Sunday sport?

Sunday is traditionally the day when we gather for worship in church as the family of God. In the modern world much sport, however, takes place on a Sunday, which raises issues for the Christian, church-going family. Sunday sport is a reality for many, from the six-year olds at mini-rugby to those competing at the highest level, such as Euan Murray, the Worcester and Scotland Rugby player, who has accepted the consequences of prioritising his Christian principle of not playing on Sundays. Similar dilemmas arise for many others.

We read in Exodus 20:8,

'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy'.

⁶²http://ec.europa.eu/sport/library/documents/tk3209201_en.pdf

⁶³http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/9591/Sectarianism_final.pdf, accessed 28.10.2013.

⁶⁴<http://www.fightforpeace.net>

⁶⁵http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/wfnews/10705357.Data_shows_gang_programme_success/

The Sunday sport issue means different things to different people. For some there is an intrinsic problem with playing sport on a Sunday. For others there is only a problem if there is a clash with church. There is also the wider issue of what is meant by the Sabbath. Moreover, if sport is part of God's creation, then can God be worshipped on the sports field as much as anywhere else? There are no easy answers for Christians caught in this situation.

Churches should consider how to accommodate the spiritual needs of children and their families who also need to support each other in their various activities. Engaging in dialogue about how to overcome the dilemmas posed by competing demands and priorities may lead to imaginative solutions being found. It may be that an alternate time for either Sunday worship or the sporting fixture can be agreed when the issues are raised and explored. Innovations such as Messy Church offer alternative ways for families to worship and to do so at times that are different from Sunday mornings, as do mid-week services that may otherwise follow more traditional forms of worship. While the Church takes the spirituality of all of its members seriously, it also needs to be seen to be doing so.

11. Conclusion

Participation in sport offers an enjoyable source of recreation, promoting as it does a sense of general wellbeing and fostering a sense of responsibility. There are benefits for both physical and mental health, educational attainment, social cohesion, and crime reduction. Involvement in sport can take many forms, such as in the occasional sortie on to the sports field or the intense training and performance of the elite athlete, as a member of a professional supporting team or of a fan club, or when supporting and encouraging children in their participation.

In competitive sport as in all other aspects of our lives, we are called to follow Jesus' command to

*'love your neighbour as yourself'*⁶⁶

and to

*'do to others as you would have them do to you'*⁶⁷.

Irrespective of the level of our involvement, we should strive to act accordingly. In so doing, our resolve to resist the potentially corrupting power of money and the temptation to use unethical means of improving the chances of a win is strengthened. Competitive sport, on the other hand,

⁶⁶ Matthew 22: 39

⁶⁷ Matthew 7: 12

provides an arena for giving thanks to God for sporting talents, opportunities to compete, and for relationships fostered through sport.

Competition involves *striving together* (with God, fellow team members, support staff, family and friends, fans and indeed opponents) while also *striving against* one's opponent. Playing against an opponent who is well matched pushes competitors to reach a higher level. It is when they

*'consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds....encouraging one another'*⁶⁸

that they can strive best together in competition. When competition is seen solely as *'striving against'* it gives rise to ruthlessness and a determination to win at all costs and sacrifices fair play and integrity for cheating and unfair advantage. Instead, we should be humble in victory and generous in defeat.

Sport, played in a manner in which players respect each other and the game, can showcase human endeavour at the highest level. In the true spirit of *striving together*, we should:

*'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others'*⁶⁹.

*'Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.'*⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Hebrews 10: 24, 25

⁶⁹ Philippians 2: 3 - 4

⁷⁰ Philippians 1: 27

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